

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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Russian, Chinese Veto of Syria Resolution “Deplorable,” Rice Says.....	1
U.S., Partners Cooperate to Counter 21st-Century Threats.....	1
Panetta, Britain’s Hammond Discuss Afghanistan, Security.....	2
Bernanke: U.S. Economy Continues Slow Recovery	3
U.S. Officials to Welcome AIDS Conference Delegates.....	3
Attorney General Holder Signs Anti-Crime Agreement in Malaysia	4
U.S., Special Envoy Annan Urge Russian Cooperation on Syria	5
U.S., EU Want to Help Small Businesses Go Global	6
U.S., Southeast Asia Work to Boost Economic Ties	7
Joint Statement by Lower Mekong Initiative on Gender Equality	7
Commerce’s Sánchez at U.S.-ASEAN Business Council in Burma.....	8
U.S. to Provide Long-Term Help to Lower Mekong River Nations	10
Clinton at U.S.-ASEAN Business Forum	11

Russian, Chinese Veto of Syria Resolution “Deplorable,” Rice Says

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer | 19 July 2012

Washington — Russia's and China's veto of a U.N. Security Council resolution on Syria that would have imposed Chapter 7 consequences for failing to implement a U.N. peace plan is “dangerous and deplorable,” said U.S. Permanent Representative to the U.N. Susan Rice, and it marks the third time both countries have “prevented the Security Council from responding credibly to the Syrian conflict.”

Speaking at the United Nations in New York July 19, Rice said the resolution would have given political support to the 300-person United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS) and “given it a fighting chance to accomplish its mandate,” which is due to expire July 20. UNSMIS was deployed to oversee the implementation of U.N. and Arab League Joint Special Envoy Kofi Annan's peace plan, but it was forced to suspend its monitoring activities in mid-June because of escalating violence.

“The only way that unarmed United Nations observers could ever deter violence is if their reports of the Syrian regime's persistent violations of the Annan plan and of their own commitments led this Security Council to impose swift and meaningful consequences for noncompliance, as requested, indeed demanded, by our Joint Special Envoy,” Rice said.

Bashar al-Assad's regime continues to fire heavy weapons against Syrians, detains and tortures its citizens and maintains “a horrific posture of intimidation and harassment,” according to reports from Annan, the UNSMIS team leader and other international officials, Rice said.

“They reported recently that the Syrian regime had escalated its crackdown, employing tanks and helicopter gunships. They reported on various occasions that the Syrian [government]-backed Shabiha militia were terrorizing entire communities, including sexually assaulting women and children,” she said.

Rice said the Security Council “has failed utterly in its most important task on its agenda this year,” and described the outcome of the vote as “another dark day in Turtle Bay.” The states that refuse to take firm action against the Assad regime are at odds with the majority of the Security Council, the League of Arab States, and the more than 100 countries in the Group of Friends of the Syrian people who called for Chapter 7 action.

Their position is also “at odds with the wishes and aspirations of the vast majority of the Syrian people, who

deserve so much better from this Security Council,” Rice said.

The July 18 attack in Damascus that killed three members of Assad's inner circle “is indicative of how the situation in Syria will continue to deteriorate in the face of this Council's inaction.” The United States will intensify its work with partners outside the Security Council in order to “bring pressure to bear on the Assad regime and to deliver assistance to those in need,” Rice said.

White House press secretary Jay Carney told reporters traveling with President Obama that the vetoes by Russia and China were “very regrettable,” and that it is “absurd” for the U.N. to send unarmed observers amid the violence and brutality of the Assad regime “if the consequences of failing to live up to ... the Assad regime's commitments are nonexistent.”

China and Russia's decisions will have repercussions for a long time in terms of how they are viewed by the Syrian people “because there is no doubt that Syria's future will not include Bashar al-Assad. His days are numbered, and it's a mistake to prop up the regime as it comes to an end,” Carney said.

U.S., Partners Cooperate to Counter 21st-Century Threats

By MacKenzie C. Babb | Staff Writer | 18 July 2012

Washington — The United States is engaging in partnerships with countries around the world to build military cooperation in the fight against 21st-century security threats, according to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

U.S. Army General Martin Dempsey spoke about the benefits of partnerships July 17 at the National Guard Symposium on Mutual Security Cooperation in Washington.

He said that in the past, governments around the world had a monopoly on top-end technologies related to lethal force and military instruments.

“I think it's pretty clear to everybody that nation-states no longer have that monopoly,” Dempsey said. “And what that does is it increases the risk in ways that I think we all need to continue to talk about and think about and interact about.”

The chairman commended the National Guard's State Partnership Program as a platform to do just that.

The 65-nation program provides unique partnership-building capabilities to combatant commanders and U.S. ambassadors through partnerships between foreign

countries and U.S. states, territories and the District of Columbia.

"The [State Partnership Program] supports U.S. national interests and security cooperation goals by engaging partner nations via military, sociopolitical and economic conduits at the local, state and national level," according to the National Guard website.

Since its start in 1992, the program has become a key U.S. security cooperation tool, facilitating collaboration across all aspects of international civil-military affairs and encouraging people-to-people ties at the state level.

"Building partnership capacity is a core element of everything we do and everything we hope to accomplish," said Kathleen Hicks, principal deputy undersecretary of defense for policy. She spoke along with Dempsey at the July 17 conference, which honored the 20th anniversary of the State Partnership Program.

Developing these partnerships "is a critical skill set across the armed forces," Hicks said. She said cooperating with allies and partners is vital, and has played a critical role in military operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya.

But Hicks said networks of security collaboration are important not just in times of crisis, but also in day-to-day deterrence. She said partners are currently working together to counter transnational crime, enhance maritime security and strengthen global humanitarian assistance.

Additionally, security cooperation is fiscally responsible, Hicks said.

"Building partnership capacity elsewhere in the world also remains important for sharing costs and responsibilities for global leadership," she said, adding that the United States military and its allies are committed to developing "innovative, low-cost and small-footprint approaches to achieve our security objectives."

Dempsey echoed that message, calling military cooperation "really a modest investment for a pretty substantial return."

Hicks said the National Guard, the oldest branch of the U.S. armed forces, is well-positioned for global military cooperation, as members' dual state and federal status affords them a broad range of skills and experience applicable to the challenges partner nations face.

Panetta, Britain's Hammond Discuss Afghanistan, Security

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer | 18 July 2012

Washington — Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and

British Defense Secretary Philip Hammond held talks at the Pentagon July 18 to discuss progress being made in Afghanistan and other global challenges the two allied nations will confront.

At a Pentagon briefing, Panetta told journalists, "We also spoke about a number of issues of shared concern in today's world, from the violence in Syria to the destabilizing behavior of Iran." The two had met for talks in May at the NATO Summit in Chicago.

Panetta said an important element of the work being done by U.S. and allied military forces in Afghanistan is making certain that the security gains are maintained during a period of transition to Afghan security control.

"Additionally, we discussed the challenges of maintaining a strong defense at a time of fiscal austerity. This department looks forward to continuing to work closely with the British military as they work to right-size their force structure and as both of our nations implement our new defense strategies," Panetta said.

Hammond, the United Kingdom's secretary of state for defense, said he and Panetta discussed at length the future threats and security challenges both will face, and the need to transform national defense structures to meet them.

"Close collaborations and working partnerships will remain the key, and the U.K. intends to remain America's most capable ally, both on current operations such as Afghanistan, where, as Secretary Panetta said, 9,500 British troops are fighting alongside American, NATO and Afghan partners, and on future operations, whether they take place on land, sea or air, or, indeed, where they are fought on the new frontier of cyberspace," Hammond told reporters.

Both nations are grappling with budget-tightening measures as leaders and legislatures assess the way ahead, and how much can be spent in the areas of national security and defense. The United States and Britain have been working together on the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter aircraft through the development, testing and initial production, Panetta said. Hammond will take delivery of an F-35 on July 19.

"The delivery of this jet is an indication of the considerable strides that we have made. The F-35 represents, I believe, the future of tactical aviation for both of our armed services," Panetta said.

Hammond said Britain will continue its close collaboration with the United States and the crucial defense partnership.

Bernanke: U.S. Economy Continues Slow Recovery

By MacKenzie C. Babb | Staff Writer | 17 July 2012

Washington — The U.S. economy is continuing to recover but appears to be doing so at a slower pace than economists expected, according to Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke.

The chairman delivered the central bank's semiannual monetary policy report to Congress July 17.

"After rising at an annual rate of 2.5 percent in the second of half of 2011, real [gross domestic product] increased at a 2 percent rate in the first quarter of 2012, and available indicators point to a still-smaller gain in the second quarter," Bernanke testified before the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs.

He said conditions in the labor market improved during the latter part of 2011 and early in 2012, with the unemployment rate falling by about a percentage point during that period to level out just over 8 percent.

Household spending has continued to increase, but the report indicates a somewhat slower rate of growth in recent months.

"Although declines in energy prices are now providing some support to consumers' purchasing power, households remain concerned about their employment and income prospects, and their overall level of confidence remains relatively low," Bernanke said.

He said the housing market has seen some modest improvements, in part because of historically low mortgage rates that are boosting new and existing home sales. Construction has also increased.

"Still, a number of factors continue to impede progress in the housing market," Bernanke said.

On the demand side, many would-be buyers are deterred by concerns about their finances or the economy in general. On the supply side, the large number of vacant homes boosted by ongoing foreclosures continues to divert demand from new construction.

After posting strong gains over the last nine months, manufacturing production and business spending have slowed to a more moderate growth rate.

"Forward-looking indicators of investment demand, such as surveys of business conditions and capital spending plans, suggest further weakness ahead," Bernanke said.

He said the United States' economic recovery continues to be held back by a number of headwinds, and currently

faces two major sources of risk.

The first is the European financial and banking crisis, which Bernanke said remains a "significant risk" to the U.S. economic outlook.

"Europe's financial markets and economy remain under significant stress, with spillover effects on financial and economic conditions in the rest of the world, including the United States," Bernanke said.

He said that as European authorities work to resolve the crisis, the United States is focused on improving the resilience of its financial system to external shocks.

The second source of risk to the U.S. recovery, according to Bernanke, is the country's domestic fiscal situation.

He called on Congress to support the economy by addressing the nation's challenges "in a way that takes into account both the need for long-run sustainability and the fragility of the recovery." Bernanke said doing so will help reduce uncertainty and boost household and business confidence.

He said the Federal Open Market Committee, the central bank's policymaking arm, met in June to assess market conditions and make decisions intended to keep the economy running smoothly.

Committee members moved to keep the target range for the federal funds rate, or the rate banks are charged for overnight loans, exceptionally low at between 0 and 0.25 percent in order to support economic growth. The committee said it expects economic conditions will likely require continued low levels for the federal funds rate at least through late 2014.

They also voted to continue to increase the Federal Reserve's holdings of longer-term securities.

Both actions are meant to result in lower borrowing costs and easier financial conditions throughout the economy, in turn promoting more rapid economic growth.

Bernanke said that in light of its concerns about the slow pace of progress in reducing unemployment and the downside risks to the economic outlook, the committee is prepared to take further action to promote a stronger economic recovery and sustained improvement in labor market conditions in the context of price stability.

U.S. Officials to Welcome AIDS Conference Delegates

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer | 17 July 2012

Washington — Top officials from the Obama administration and the U.S. Congress will welcome an

estimated 25,000 delegates and media representatives on their way to the U.S. capital for the XIX International AIDS Conference July 22–27.

The White House announced July 17 that President Obama will address the conference with a video message, expressing his belief that the world is at a critical moment in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

“We can beat this disease. We can win this fight,” said President Obama in his World AIDS Day address in December 2011. “We just have to keep at it, steady, persistent — today, tomorrow, every day until we get to zero.”

In a November 2011 speech, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton expressed the belief that the emergence of an AIDS-free generation could be on the horizon. She will be among the speakers to address the conference, according to the White House announcement, and is expected to urge conference delegates to provide greater support for efforts to expand recent scientific advances in both treatment and prevention.

The International AIDS Society (IAS) — composed of more than 16,000 individuals working with the disease in some capacity — sponsors the biennial conference, the largest meeting focused solely on this disease. IAS members who have kept close watch on the advances in prevention and the search for a cure seem to concur with U.S. officials that a special moment has arrived.

“The past few years have been a scientific watershed in the life of the HIV/AIDS epidemic,” said Elly Katabira, IAS president and international chairwoman of the conference, “one that has given us the tools to potentially make major inroads into the epidemic on an unprecedented scale.”

The IAS has chosen a conference theme in sync with that aspiration: “Turning the Tide Together.”

About 34 million people are believed to be infected with HIV. While the latest annual figures from 2010 show a decline in deaths and new infections, the total number of lives claimed by the epidemic over the last 30 years stands at an estimated 30 million.

Other Obama administration officials who will speak at the conference include those from the health agencies on the front lines of the effort to control the HIV/AIDS epidemic domestically and internationally. They include Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sibelius and Global AIDS Ambassador Eric Goosby.

Leading officials from the National Institutes of Health

will also make presentations to the conference, outlining the scientific advances made by the research institution. Notably, they include advances in prevention, treatment outcomes and HIV diagnosis.

The United States has played a leading role in global research on the disease. In fact, government documents say the U.S. AIDS research portfolio represents the largest and most significant public investment in AIDS research in the world.

The United States Congress has played a strong supporting role in the international assistance that the nation has provided to address the epidemic globally. U.S. Senators John Kerry and Lindsey Graham and Representatives Nancy Pelosi and Barbara Lee are set to speak at a high-level session, according to an announcement from the IAS organizing committee, AIDS 2012.

Since 2004, the United States has devoted \$45.7 billion to the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), which assists nations experiencing the greatest suffering from HIV/AIDS, many of them in sub-Saharan Africa. The administration of President George W. Bush initially proposed the program and carried it through its first five years. The Obama administration, with congressional endorsement, has increased the level of funding.

The IAS is attracting further star power to the conference. British rocker and humanitarian Elton John is on the speakers list as the principal donor to the Elton John AIDS Foundation. Actresses Whoopi Goldberg and Sharon Stone are also making appearances.

Attorney General Holder Signs Anti-Crime Agreement in Malaysia

17 July 2012

Washington — U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder, on an official visit to Malaysia, signed an agreement July 17 with Malaysian Minister for Home Affairs Datuk Seri Hishammuddin bin Tun Hussein on assistance in the area of transnational crime.

The two signed the memorandum of understanding (MOU) as part of their meeting to discuss transnational crime, terrorism and other areas of U.S.-Malaysian law enforcement cooperation.

“With the signing of this memorandum of understanding, we reaffirm that the United States and Malaysia share a robust commitment to protecting our citizens from criminal activities that transcend jurisdictions, cross international borders and span across the globe,” Holder said, according to a Department of Justice press release.

"This agreement encourages direct cooperation between key authorities and law enforcement officials, allowing our two nations to more effectively — and more collaboratively — respond to the evolving transnational challenges we must confront. I'm confident that it will strengthen our ability to safeguard our citizens and bring dangerous criminals to justice."

Under the MOU, law enforcement officials from both countries will be able to share information to prevent and investigate transnational crime, including human trafficking, drug trafficking, terrorism, money laundering, cybercrime and organized crime. The MOU encourages expanded direct and informal cooperation among law enforcement officers in both countries to assist in investigations.

In addition, the MOU will enhance capacity-building efforts through training, consultations and exchanges. Information will not be shared where it is not legally permitted by either country.

The MOU is part of a larger picture of growing cooperation between the United States and Malaysia in a range of areas from law enforcement to trade, from educational and cultural exchanges to bilateral dialogue.

After the signing ceremony, Holder met with the prime minister of Malaysia, Dato' Sri Najib Tun Abdul Razak.

Earlier in the day, Holder met with U.S. Embassy personnel and then spoke to sessions and magistrate court judges, prosecutors, government officials and the Malaysian Bar Council about their efforts to hold criminals accountable and protect the civil liberties of all citizens.

Holder will meet with local law enforcement officials before traveling to Singapore for meetings with U.S. Ambassador to Singapore David Adelman and local law enforcement counterparts.

U.S., Special Envoy Annan Urge Russian Cooperation on Syria

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer | 17 July 2012

Washington — The United States is pressing Russia to agree to a U.N. Security Council resolution on Syria that would impose consequences on the Syrian government for its failure to comply with U.N. and Arab League Joint Special Envoy Kofi Annan's peace efforts, including ending the use of heavy weaponry against the Syrian people.

In Jerusalem, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said July 16 that U.S. diplomats "are working very hard in New York in the Security Council to obtain a Chapter 7

resolution with consequences," and that Annan is in Moscow for discussions with Russian officials in an effort to directly make the case for the resolution.

Annan has expressed the need for a Chapter 7 resolution, and Clinton said, "We agree with that completely. So we're going to continue to press forward in the Security Council. We're going to continue to press the Russians because that is an important part of reaching a resolution in the Security Council."

The secretary expressed concern over the increase in violence, which has spread to the Syrian capital, Damascus, and its suburbs, and said Bashar al-Assad's regime cannot survive.

"I just wish that it would move out of the way sooner instead of later so that more lives could be saved, and we could have the chance to achieve the kind of democratic transition that we all, including Russia, agreed to," she said.

In an interview with CNN July 16, Clinton said the United States is trying to intervene in the conflict "in a way that brings about an end to the violence and a transition to a democratic future," but which "doesn't require adding to the violence, further militarizing the conflict, perhaps killing more people and pushing them across the borders."

The secretary said "everyone is very wary, for good reason, of that kind of intervention," and does not want to add to the violence.

She urged others in the international community to "put pressure on Russia in the Security Council so that they will support a Chapter 7 resolution," that imposes "very hard sanctions on people and institutions that support the regime" if it fails to implement U.N. peace efforts.

"That would be the best signal we could send to Assad that his days are numbered," she said.

In New York, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations Susan Rice said July 16 that more than 100 Syrians are dying per day on average, and the Security Council needs to "do something different to change the dynamic on the ground."

In his July 10 report to the Security Council, Annan said Assad had repeated his commitment to immediately halt the use of heavy weapons against the Syrian people, but Rice said he has instead "intensified" their use, including at the village of Traymseh where 200 men, women and children were massacred by Syrian forces using artillery, tanks and helicopters.

The Security Council is discussing the renewal of the 300-person United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS), whose mandate expires July 20. Rice said the Chapter 7 resolution that has been put on the table by the United Kingdom addresses the need for "something new" in response to the nearly 18 months of violence in Syria.

Annan's peace efforts need to be made binding, and the Security Council needs to be prepared to "consider and to implement sanctions in a short period of time if nothing changes," she said.

Given Assad's repeated failure to honor his commitments, "we think this resolution is the only one that makes any sense," Rice said.

"What we're asking is that the Council do something different, that we apply meaningful pressure on the Assad regime to stop the use of heavy weapons, which is a critical first step to get any cease-fire going and to get any political process going. But if we do nothing, if we just perpetuate the status quo, then we are consigning Syria and the region to much-intensified conflict," she said.

U.S. HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE CONTINUES

According to a July 16 State Department fact sheet, the Obama administration is providing nearly \$64 million in humanitarian relief for people who have been affected by the violence, both inside Syria and in neighboring countries that are hosting those who have fled the violence.

The assistance includes \$27.5 million to the World Food Programme; \$15.1 million to various nongovernmental organizations; \$8.5 million to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees; and \$8 million to the International Committee of the Red Cross. In addition, the United States is providing support through the U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East; the U.N. Children's Fund; the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; and the U.N. Department of Safety and Security.

According to the fact sheet, the United Nations estimates that up to 1.5 million people in Syria need urgent humanitarian assistance, and between 300,000 and 500,000 have fled their homes because of the violence.

U.S. assistance has included medical supplies, food, water, clothing, hygiene kits and other humanitarian relief, and is being distributed to the most vulnerable "on the basis of need, not political affiliation," the State Department said.

The State Department praised humanitarian workers in

Syria who are "putting their lives on the line on a daily basis to deliver aid to those suffering from the escalating violence." It also commended the generosity of Syria's neighbors in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq, "who have kept their borders open and are hosting and providing assistance to those fleeing the violence in Syria."

U.S., EU Want to Help Small Businesses Go Global

By Phillip Kurata | Staff Writer | 16 July 2012

Washington — A senior U.S. trade official has been talking with U.S. and European business people and officials about finding ways to make it easier for small and medium-sized companies to engage in foreign trade.

"The United States wants to ensure that our small and medium enterprises have the tools they need to compete in the trans-Atlantic marketplace and around the world," Deputy U.S. Trade Representative Miriam Sapiro said in Rome July 12. She was speaking at a workshop organized by the Transatlantic Economic Council to help smaller companies sell their goods and services on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean and elsewhere.

"Small and medium-sized enterprises collectively not only employ a majority of workers in the United States and the EU, but are also a critical source of innovative processes, products and services that are key engines of economic growth, job creation and competitiveness," she said.

According to Sapiro, trade barriers affect smaller companies more than larger companies. In the manufacturing sector, for example, businesses with limited resources often find it difficult to meet foreign testing and certification requirements. In the services sector, smaller companies tend to suffer more from having their intellectual property stolen, while facing greater difficulty in establishing affiliates, she said.

The deputy trade representative cited compelling economic data that support the case for helping smaller businesses grow their foreign accounts. U.S. small businesses account for nearly 98 percent of all U.S. exporters, she said, and the value of their exports in 2010 was more than \$380 billion, a 24 percent leap from the previous year. The small-business sector accounts for a third of all U.S. exports.

Sapiro went over the steps that the Obama administration has taken to spur small-business growth, such as tax cuts, reduction of paperwork, increased access to credit, and export assistance.

"These trends are positive, but I believe we can do better," she said. "What can we do together to help small

companies trying to overcome the challenges of selling abroad?"

U.S., Southeast Asia Work to Boost Economic Ties

By MacKenzie C. Babb | Staff Writer | 16 July 2012

Washington — Strengthening economic ties between the United States and Southeast Asia generates benefits for both sides and is a major priority for the Obama administration, according to Under Secretary of Commerce for International Trade Francisco Sánchez.

He said enhancing regional business, trade and investment relations is a "win-win partnership" in remarks to the inaugural U.S.-Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Business Forum July 13 in Siem Reap, Cambodia.

For American businesses, Southeast Asia "represents more markets to explore, more customers to reach and more opportunities to provide products and services," Sánchez said.

In turn, he said, U.S. products and services "will continue to contribute to the ASEAN region's dynamic economic development."

Trade between the United States and ASEAN member economies has increased significantly in recent years. In 2011, U.S. exports to Southeast Asia exceeded \$76 billion — progress the under secretary said is promoting economies on both sides of the ocean.

"It's important that we keep this momentum going," Sánchez said. "That's what today is all about — removing the obstacles that prevent a richer trade and investment relationship and helping each other make the most of the opportunities before us."

He said the forum's agenda covered a wide range of topics, including improving supply-chain efficiency, building growth industries like renewable energy, and creating a more attractive business environment through increased transparency and information sharing.

In particular, Sánchez said, talks were set to focus on infrastructure development. The U.S. Commerce Department is scheduled to lead a infrastructure-focused trade mission to Indonesia and Vietnam later in 2012.

"We want to do more than just build roads and bridges," he said. "We want to build new opportunities across the region."

He said the business forum is an important part of the effort to build a better future for all ASEAN members.

"By talking together, we can better work together, and grow together, and prosper together," Sánchez said.

President Obama and his administration have made increasing U.S. engagement with the Asia-Pacific region an important priority in recent years.

"We did so because we share a deep and rich history together, and want to build on this history to ensure our futures are even brighter," Sánchez said.

The under secretary was joined on the trip by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, who led the delegation, and by Under Secretary of State Robert Hormats. They joined representatives from all ASEAN members, as well as business leaders with a presence in the region.

ASEAN was established in 1967 by Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand to promote regional growth and development, and the group has since been joined by Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Burma and Cambodia.

The business forum directly followed the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, where Clinton delivered remarks pledging the United States' continued investment in Southeast Asia.

Joint Statement by Lower Mekong Initiative on Gender Equality

16 July 2012

Following is the text of a joint statement issued for the second Friends of the Lower Mekong Ministerial meeting on July 13, 2012, in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesperson
July 16, 2012

Lower Mekong Initiative Joint Statement on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

We, as Lower Mekong Initiative ministers and senior officials, recognize that the economic, social, and political progress of our region can only be achieved with consistent efforts to advance gender equality and the status of women and girls in the region.

We recognize that women and girls make vital contributions to economic growth and sustainable development. We affirm the right of women to participate fully in the economic lives of our nations, including as workers, entrepreneurs, consumers, and caregivers and pledge to work to ensure their full access to assets, markets, training, and other support to improve their livelihoods and grow their businesses.

We recognize that no government can succeed when the voices and talents of half its people are untapped. We affirm the right of women to participate fully in the political and civic lives of our nations – and pledge to promote their success as policymakers and civic participants, as civil servants and elected officials, as journalists and commentators, and as peace negotiators and peacekeepers.

We condemn gender-based violence and violence against women. We affirm the right of women and girls to live free from violence in the home, at school, at work, in their communities and pledge to ensure that laws to protect them will be passed and effectively enforced, that victims of gender based violence will find support and redress, and all members of society including men and boys will be engaged in community-wide efforts to prevent gender-based violence.

We recognize that families and communities are stronger when women and girls have access to quality health care, when adolescent girls can complete their educations, when women are enlisted as equal partners in efforts to conserve water, energy, and agro-forestland, and when women can participate fully in the digital and mobile technology revolutions sweeping the world.

We affirm that women and girls must be fully integrated – both as change agents and beneficiaries – into the work, activities, and goals of the Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI), and pledge to ensure that issues concerning women and girls will be fully considered and that women will participate in the development of the LMI pillars.

We recognize that capacity building is vital to ensure that all countries can effectively promote the advancement of women and girls in society. International cooperation should also take into account, as appropriate, possible capacity building needs of LMI countries in this regard. We also encourage all countries in the LMI to share best practices on the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment in order to enhance capacity of countries in the region.

We look forward to discussing the concept of a Lower Mekong Initiative gender working group comprised of men and women representatives from each of our nations to set specific goals into all of the LMI pillars and to measure our progress against these goals.

Commerce's Sánchez at U.S.-ASEAN Business Council in Burma

14 July 2012

U.S. Department of Commerce
Francisco Sánchez,
Under Secretary of Commerce for International Trade
2012 U.S.-ASEAN Business Council
Rangoon, Burma
Saturday, July 14, 2012

As prepared for delivery

Thank you for that kind introduction.

Allow me to recognize all those involved with the Council for their tireless efforts to bring us all together. I would also like to thank our host country for its strong leadership.

I am incredibly excited to be here in Burma, along with dozens of U.S. companies; I am excited because there are great possibilities for mutually beneficial new partnerships between our public and private sectors.

We come together at a time full of great opportunity.

The challenges this nation has faced and overcome in recent years have been formidable.

And the creative solutions designed to meet these challenges have greatly improved the nature of our relationship.

Increased support for bilateral commercial ties, and the easing of sanctions against new investment by U.S. companies, marks some of the most significant changes in American economic policy towards this country.

In fact, today's visit marks the first high-level economic and business mission by U.S. government officials in decades.

And I'm glad the U.S. government and private sector could come together today to support its work toward continued economic reform and revitalization, which has the potential to lift literally millions out of poverty.

Ties are now stronger than ever.

And we are here today to reaffirm that commitment by adding a dynamic new commercial element.

Current democratic reforms are encouraging, and we commend local efforts to strengthen the economy and grow commercial industries.

The presence of U.S. companies here today demonstrates their strong interest in supporting these efforts.

While much remains to be done, it is heartening to see the hard work of its citizens beginning to pay off.

Efforts to increase transparency and egalitarian rule not only inspire confidence in its own citizens, but in the international community as well.

Recently, the U.S. government announced its intention to formally re-establish a USAID mission in Rangoon, and we have begun exploring ways to help American companies create local partnerships.

We have also lent our support for a United Nations Development Program here.

As you can see, many of us in the international community believe in this country's democratic and economic future.

And we want to celebrate and participate in it.

Extensive reforms, and this country's growing role in ASEAN, will bring enhanced cooperation with all member nations as well as the international business community at large.

The entire region is a global economic center and Burma is fast becoming an invaluable addition to this commercial dynamic.

This new economic climate is creating opportunities for local and international businesses and entrepreneurs, and I am pleased that we are poised to take part in this changing environment so filled with opportunities.

We should all be proud of how much has been accomplished so far.

Between 2010 and 2011, U.S. exports to Burma quadrupled. But that was from a very low base, so it wasn't surprising.

I know we can grow the trade relationship exponentially.

The Department of Commerce is undertaking three initiatives to move forward our commercial relationship with this country, as a complement to the broader U.S. government's moves to ease restrictions on trade and investment.

The International Trade Administration, which I represent, has the lead on two of these initiatives.

First, we understand that companies are thirsty for

reliable information about the commercial environment here.

We have created a "Doing Business in Burma" page on the website of our U.S. Commercial Service Thailand office.

There you will find an excellent list of useful information and contacts.

There are think tanks, articles and presentations on a range of topics, as well as organizations and individuals with expertise on local markets and industries.

Further, we are posting updates on commercial developments.

We are working with the Economic Section in the Embassy to update the Country Commercial Guide to help U.S. companies better navigate this complex and new market opportunity.

Secondly, I have directed our Senior Commercial Officer in Bangkok, Mike McGee, to ramp up our partnership with our State colleagues in Rangoon.

Mike is here for two weeks to explore the commercial environment and to make practical recommendations on how we can best promote American business here.

Let me note that Mike has extensive experience in developing markets.

Mike would you stand up so people will be able to find you at the reception?

Third, the Commerce Department's Office of General Counsel will bring expert assistance to the Burmese Government as they create the legal framework for business.

The Commercial Law Development Program focuses on guiding transitioning countries through commercial legal reforms.

They plan to bring expert assistance to the Burmese Government to help improve the legal and regulatory framework to support business and trade.

Such work could potentially involve the New York Convention and the enforcement of arbitral awards, which are going to be key for local economic development.

New commercial freedoms here have attracted much foreign interest.

An untold number of companies from the United States and around the world are now looking to invest in this promising nation.

One example is the energy industry.

European, Chinese, and other companies have robust investments in this sector, and American companies have shown strong interest as well.

The Ministry of Energy has announced plans for an international bidding process for 25 offshore oil and gas blocks within the next two or three months.

Furthermore, I know that U.S. businesses have welcomed the recent easing of U.S. sanctions against new investments here and the news that they will soon be able to export financial services when licensed.

And as U.S. investment increases, we all hope economic growth and jobs will follow.

Greater economic engagement is one of our greatest methods of support to the people of Burma.

This engagement is helping to lead the charge toward more prosperous commercial relationships.

The Burmese government has pursued its own economic reforms.

President Thein Sein and his government have taken steps to unify multiple exchange rates and are preparing a new national development plan.

In a speech last month, he announced new targets for economic growth and per capital income increases along with plans to reduce the size of the state-owned business sector.

Furthermore, the Burmese Ministry of Finance claims to have implemented 80 percent of your government's tariff reduction plan.

Burmese economic and democratic reforms have been beneficial to all of us.

I hope today will result in even stronger relationships because we have the potential to do so much more.

Yet many challenges still need answers, and I am confident we will work through these as our relationship expands.

I hope our discussions will bring direction and provide responses to many of these questions.

I am honored to be part of this historic trip.

And I look forward to working with all of you here to see the promise of this occasion translated into a brighter future for Burma and prosperity for both our nations.

U.S. to Provide Long-Term Help to Lower Mekong River Nations

By Phillip Kurata | Staff Writer | 13 July 2012

Washington — The United States will provide \$50 million over the next three years to fund health, environmental, women's empowerment and other developmental projects in Southeast Asian countries linked to the Lower Mekong River.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced the funding in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, July 13 when she unveiled a new, long-term commitment to the region known as the Lower Mekong Initiative 2020 (LMI 2020).

"It is a multiyear vision for how the United States can help each of our partners together as well as individually to build a more prosperous region," she said.

One part of LMI 2020 involves U.S. support for a new partnership between the government of Vietnam and Harvard University to train the region's next generation of public policy specialists and leaders in key areas. Other efforts under LMI 2020 will inject new resources into the fight against malaria and climate change. The funding for LMI 2020 is in addition to bilateral support the United States already provides.

LMI 2020 will have a coordinating hub at the office of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in Bangkok to facilitate cooperation and connectivity among the members. Clinton made it clear that participation by all is needed to make the initiative a success.

"We think this initiative has great potential, but it can only be successful if we have full participation of all the partners, because we need your ideas and we need your very constructive and candid dialogue with us," she said.

One of the sensitive topics among the countries in the Lower Mekong region is dam construction, which could help some but harm others.

"Some studies have explored the benefits of generating electricity, but serious questions remain about the effects on fisheries, agriculture, livelihoods, environment and health," she said.

Clinton said the United States and other donor countries are prepared to commit up to \$1 million to support studies on the impact of dams on the Lower Mekong. She

urged the governments of Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam to hold off starting dam construction until the controversies are resolved.

Clinton made a special point during her stay in Cambodia to emphasize the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment. The U.S. government is launching several new activities focused on strengthening women's leadership skills and incorporating their voices into policy discussions.

Those activities involve building a regional network of women leaders in government and civil society to address common issues such as environmental resources and management, funding scholarships for future women engineers, and providing financial backing for female scientists in the Lower Mekong countries to collaborate with U.S. scientists, according to a State Department fact sheet.

To support Burma's political transition toward democracy, the United States and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are sending a trade and investment delegation July 14-15 in an effort to connect the once-isolated country with the global economy.

Clinton said LMI 2020 symbolizes a long-term U.S. commitment to the region. "We're proud to be your partners, enduring partners, as you promote security and prosperity, and we look forward to many years of working together," she said.

Clinton at U.S.-ASEAN Business Forum

13 July 2012

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesperson
July 13, 2012

REMARKS

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton
At the U.S.-ASEAN Business Forum

July 13, 2012
Meridien Hotel
Siem Reap, Cambodia

SECRETARY CLINTON: (In progress.) It's a pleasure to welcome you to the U.S.-ASEAN Business Council Forum: Commitment to Connectivity. And we are so honored to have three distinguished leaders here with us tonight. You will be hearing from each of them about the importance of advancing the ASEAN connectivity agenda and steps we can all take in government and in business, in ASEAN and in our individual countries to advance

integration and economic engagement.

I'm very grateful to Prime Minister Hun Sen for hosting us and being with us. Cambodia has just completed the ASEAN ministerial, and we are grateful that you would find the time to come here and be with us, Prime Minister.

I also want to thank President Thein Sein, who has moved his country such a long distance in such a short period of time. And we are very much looking forward to hearing your comments. And Prime Minister Yingluck, it is always a pleasure to be with you and to work with you. Thailand is our oldest ally in the region, one of our oldest allies in the world, and we are honored that you are here.

I want to thank the ministers and ambassadors from across ASEAN who have joined us here in this historic city. And I especially want to thank Myron Brilliant from the Chamber of Commerce and Alex Feldman from the U.S.-ASEAN Business Council.

And finally, a very warm welcome to all the representatives from the private sector. Here tonight are dozens of leaders of ASEAN companies from all over the ASEAN region, in addition to dozens of leaders from American companies. By our count, this is the largest U.S.-ASEAN business event ever assembled. And I assume that will be a challenge so that the next events will be even bigger as we see the results of our efforts.

As Myron said, you know that we are certainly elevating our engagement across the board with Asia, and we're paying particular attention to ASEAN and Southeast Asia. We're pursuing a economic statecraft and jobs diplomacy agenda to promote sustainable growth and prosperity across the region and, of course, we know that by doing so it will help the countries of ASEAN, but it will also help the United States.

Our economic ties are already strong. ASEAN and the United States are large trading partners. Last year, U.S. exports to ASEAN exceeded \$76 billion, and that was up 42 percent since 2009. We have more than twice as much investment in ASEAN as we do in China. So there is a great deal of potential for continuing to grow our economic activity.

We want to do more to deepen our economic partnership. For example, with our ASEAN Single Window and other ADVANCE programs, we are working with ASEAN to develop a fully integrated market by harmonizing customs and improving regulatory standards. And later this fall, our trade ministers will gather here in Siem Reap to discuss ways to advance our Trade and Investment Framework Agreement, the operating system of our economic partnership.

I'm also very convinced that by promoting economic activity in the region, it is not only about encouraging businesses to invest and trade, it is also about building relationships. And the best way to do that is to be sure that we promote a rules-based system, because the difference between a region on the path to sustainable growth and one whose gains will be more short term are the norms and the standards for intellectual property protection, for predictability in setting rules, and enforcing laws to try to ensure a level playing field for everyone.

And we want ASEAN and the Asia Pacific to be open for business to everyone willing to work hard and make those investments. And we want especially to encourage entrepreneurs, because after all, that's where the new ideas come from; that's where the new businesses start; that's where small and medium-sized enterprises really get their impetus for growth.

I gave a speech in Hong Kong last July describing what we hoped will be a thriving economic system across the Asia Pacific. It came down to four key attributes: openness, freedom, transparency, and fairness. And we believe that those all go together.

So let us work and try to determine the best way to increase that connectivity, increase those relationships, make those investments, and really build sustainable economies, jobs here, jobs back home in the United States, and the kind of future that we want in the 21st century for the people of the ASEAN nations.

Let me just set the stage for all three speakers. We will hear first from the Prime Minister of Cambodia. Cambodia has achieved tremendous economic progress during the tenure of Prime Hun Sen, and the United States is proud of our economic partnership. The United States is the number one importer of Cambodian-made garments – and this is a shameless plug, but I will say it anyway – thanks to trade deals we did back in the 1990s. (Laughter.) And those trade deals included labor and workplace standards, so the now 350,000 Cambodians, 90 percent of whom are young women, working in the textile industry in Cambodia have seen tremendous advances. Now, Cambodia will see the first to say they have more to do and they are working on that, but we want to continue to support their economic progress.

We also want to point to one other example of an innovative partnership with American business – General Electric is finalizing a rice-husk biomass integrated power project, the first in the region. What a great idea for ASEAN countries, particularly in the Lower Mekong, to use rice husks to generate energy. So this has got great potential.

We'll next hear from the Prime Minister of Thailand, whose leadership has helped her country recover from the effects of the devastating floods last year and achieve economic growth at the start of this year. We are working to link Thai and American businesses through several public-private partnerships: Google is helping to connect more than 100,000 small and medium-sized businesses throughout Thailand; MasterCard is working with the Bank of Thailand to promote electronic mobile banking training; and Coca-Cola is creating an upcoming women's entrepreneurship fund. So we're very pleased that Prime Minister Yingluck could join us.

And finally, we will hear from President Thein Sein. This week has been a milestone in the relationship between our two countries. Just two days ago, President Obama announced that the United States is easing restrictions to allow more U.S. companies to do business there. And a few months ago in Washington, I urged American businesses to invest and to do it responsibly. Under Secretary Bob Hormats, who is here today, will be taking the largest U.S. business delegation – over 70 businesses – tomorrow to meet with officials, to meet with businesses, to meet with civil society. And we're excited by what lies ahead, and we're very supportive of President Thein Sein's economic and political reforms.

And finally, I want to thank everyone from the private sector and the organizations involved and ASEAN and my team at the State Department, led by Assistant Secretary Kurt Campbell, for understanding that connectivity is a word that has to have meaning. And much of that meaning comes from greater relationships between our governments, between our private sectors, between our civil societies, and most importantly, between and among our people.

So it's very exciting to see everything that is happening here. And now it is my pleasure to introduce our host this evening, Prime Minister Hun Sen. (Applause.)

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